patheos | Search Patheos | SPECIAL OFFERS

Buddhist | Catholic | Contemplative | Evangelical | General Christian | Hindu | Jewish | Latter-day Saint | Muslim | New Visions | Progressive Christian

Trending: Lent | Ice | Trump | Forgiveness | Marriage | Deconstruction

AIDAN KELLY: INCLUDING PAGANISM

HOME ABOUT AIDAN KELLY ALL POSTS

Home > Pagan > On My Love for Sophia, Our Lady of Wisdom and Mercy

On My Love For Sophia, Our Lady Of Wisdom And Mercy

LAST UPDATED ON: JUNE 26, 2013 AT 1:41 PM · BY AIDAN KELLY

It is common to suppose that knowledge is not wisdom, but just what is the difference between them? Mapping knowledge is easy enough: mathematics, science, humanities, social studies (they should be scholarly, but they are not sciences), then dividing them into categories, subcategories, and so on, down to a sub^{n}category small enough that one can know everything relevant to that tiny slice of reality. That is the ambition of almost every academic researcher. But as a result, said researcher knows no more about all the rest of the universe than your average college graduate and for many fields, even less. But what about important questions that do not fit neatly into any one academic category? For the most part, they are ignored. Of course, I have known a few extraordinary exceptions to that pattern, and I chose early on that the difficult questions are the ones I must pursue, wherever they lead, crashing through the boundaries of academic turf.

But what would the subdivisions of wisdom be? And exactly what is it we are naming by using the word "wisdom"? Let us begin with the naming of names, for, as *The Gospel of Philip* says, "we cannot know Truth without names." We cannot understand an amorphous, undifferentiated plenum, such as the author of *Genesis* 1 says everything began from.

The sounds of a name are arbitrary. Names are categories (some of which are built into us, as Kant deduced) that we impose on reality in order to have a way to understand it and cope with it. Hence it is important that the structures and assumptions of our system of naming should be consistent with whatever the structure of reality might be. It is not safe to assume that the inherent assumptions of the language we grew up speaking even approximate such consistency.

Down to specifics. The term "Pagan theology" is problematic. Aside from the problem of what the concrete referents of "Pagan" are, the term "theology" incorporates assumptions that are probably not consistent with what "Pagan" means to most Pagans. The Greek roots of "theology" mean "the study of god(s)"; when a Greek used *ho Theos*, which meant "the god," he or she always meant Zeus. The opening line of *Genesis* in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures done in Alexandria in the third century BCE) can actually be translated as "At first, Zeus created Uranus and Gaia." But the "-ology" part derives from *logos*, which in Greek meant both "word" and "rationality." The first line of the poem that begins the *Gospel According to John* is familiar as "In the beginning was the Word," reflecting that first line of *Genesis,* but since it is poetry, it has more than one meaning. The Greek, transliterated, is *En arche eyn ho logos*. Here *arche* can also mean "rulership," as in "monarch." Hence the line can also mean "In rulership was reason"; that is, it is a statement of faith that the cosmos was created logically, so that we *can* understand it. In that sense, the study of theology is study of "the logic of the divine."

But neither Pagans nor anyone else approaches their religion merely logically. I realized this morning, weeping with joy over the Supreme Court decision that guarantees equality for everyone, that the word we need is "philosophy," from *philos* and *Sophia,* that is, Love of Wisdom. In my Ethics class last night, I emphasized that the major difference in how people make ethical decisions is psychological: some try making such decisions logically, by deciding what rule applies; others, as in Carol Gilligan's Care Ethics, make them holistically, in terms of what's best for all the people concerned. We can map knowledge logically, but Wisdom is a person, Sophia, and She is the Queen who is hidden, not only in the gospels, but also in the Jewish scriptures. Look at *Proverbs* 8: 22-31, where She says,

> I was by his side when he began his way, before his ancient work.
>
> I was always established, from the very first, before the Earth existed.
>
> I came to be before the depths, before the fountains of water,
>
> Before the mountains, before the hills, before he made the Earth. . . .
>
> I was there when he prepared the heavens and encompassed the deep . . .
>
> I his sister, raised with him.
>
> I was his delight every day, rejoicing before him,
>
> Rejoicing wherever men could live,
>
> For I was delighted by all humankind.

That's pretty much my own translation. I do not get the impression from this poetry that Sophia is subordinate to Adonai. Rather, She seems to be his partner in creation. The Gnostic Christians exalted Her even more. The Coptic documents (especially *On the Origin of the World*) tell us more about Sophia, as well as about Mary Magdalene. For example,

> Sophia is a Holy Queen and a shining robe . . . First-Begotten Sophia, Mother of the Universe, whom some call Love. . . . became the womb of everything, for it is She who exists before all. . . .
>
> Our sister Sophia . . . came down in innocence . . . that by the Father's will She might bring All into union with the light. . . . [She] stretched forth her finger and introduced light into matter and pursued it down into the region of chaos. . . . Sophia created great luminous bodies and the stars in the sky to shine upon the Earth and render signs of the times, seasons, . . .
>
> [The God] sang songs of praise to Sophia and her daughter Zoe [Life]. They caught him up and gave him charge of the seventh heaven. . . . Sophia placed Zoe on his right to teach him . . . since that day [his] right [hand] has been called Zoe, the left, . . . unrighteousness.
>
> The finest emanation of Sophia is spoken of in "He created them in the image of God, male and female created he them."
>
> Sophia sent her daughter Zoe as an instructor in order to make Adam arise. . . . The woman filled with the Spirit came and spoke with him, saying, "Adam, arise!" When he saw her, he said, "It is you who have given me life. You will be called the Mother of All Living, for it is She who is my mother." . . . [She] became the instructor and taught them, saying, "Your eyes will be opened and you will be like the Gods, recognizing evil and good."

Just as John portrayed Jesus as the incarnation of the Word, at least some of the Gnostic Christians believed that the Magdalene was the incarnation of Sophia—but that is a line of thought I will pursue later.

My good friend, the late Robert Chrisman, gave me a copy of Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* in 1961. I read through it eight times during the next decade; on the fourth reading I managed to put his entire argument together. I used his theology to create a Goddess wedding for my friends Larry and Catherine Shaw, celebrated at summer solstice in 1963, on Mt. Diablo (ironic). It did not seem like a very significant event at the time. My friend of these fifty years, Fritz Muntean, told me that during his MA program at Simon Fraser University, his Catholic professors were intrigued by his knowledge of the Craft. They knew about the duotheism of the Gardnerians, but wanted to know where this variety focused on the supremacy of the Goddess had come from. Fritz told them that wedding was the first public announcement of the concept he knew about. They were delighted to have a date and told him that, since the veneration of Mary had been put on a back burner by Vatican II, we were keeping it warm.

How Jesus' mother, Mary, came to be proclaimed the Queen of Heaven is also a story for another time. Back in the Catholic 1950s, we did not pray directly to Jesus, only to his mother. (Good Jewish girl. She could guilt-trip him, right?) That's the reason for the Vatican II change. But I have a little bit of sympathy for the elderly who mourn some of what was lost. The beautiful closing prayer of that liturgy was burned into my memory, like the Preamble to the Declaration.

> Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our Life, our Sweetness, and our Hope,
>
> To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve,
>
> To thee do we sigh, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.
>
> Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy on us . . .

So here is embodied that bifurcation in people's concept of ethics, between a God for Justice and a Goddess of Mercy. About three years after that wedding, before the founding of the NROOGD, long before the Nag Hammadi documents were available, I wrote this section of my long "History" poem:

> **10. Isis Unvaled**
>
> The First Person is God the Lover.
>
> The Second Person is God the Beloved.
>
> The Third Person is God the Love.
>
> God the Beloved is both male and female,
>
> And creation is the naming of names
>
> By the Word, who is male,
>
> On the Matrix, who is female.
>
> Intellection differentiates.
>
> Perception differentiates.
>
> Even self-awareness differentiates.
>
> What integrates?
>
> You're trying too hard.
>
> But it revolves around Merry. The whirled
>
> Is all ways infinitely veri us
>
> And immaculate.
>
> Come on, admit it:
>
> She always was God.

Without that Goddess, we are impoverished. One day in 1979, during a trip to Colorado, during the period when I was trying to be a Good Catholic again, in a very deep depression, I sat down on the lawn before a statue of the Blessed Virgin, and this is what I heard.

> **My Lady Chides Me, for Being Slow, in Spring**
>
> Aidan, couldn't you ever see
>
> It was always me you sought?
>
> Mapping rooms where I had lived,
>
> Sorting clothes I once had worn,
>
> As if you thought that butterflies
>
> Lived among dried bits of chrysaleis.
>
> I am not the persons I have been;
>
> You cannot find the child you were
>
> In places where you lived: others
>
> Are living there, now is their now.
>
> Art-deco radios in antique stores
>
> Cannot receive the shows you heard.
>
> You will not meet yourself upon the stairs
>
> Or by turning a certain corner suddenly.
>
> You know that wide-eyed, hesitant boy
>
> Cannot forgive you until he is forgiven,
>
> For now you know how forgiveness feels.
>
> Oh, yes, it was always me you seek,
>
> Me whom once you sang more clear
>
> Than you have in recent years.
>
> And perhaps you'll sing more sweet
>
> Now that you know somewhat
>
> Of who and where I'm not.
>
> And when you are lost and heartsick,
>
> When all logic fails, you'll sit at my feet
>
> And weave me daisy crowns and clover wreathes
>
> Until your heart will let you be, at peace.

I have many thoughts about whose voice I heard, but I can say only:

Hail, Holy Queen.

PAGAN RSS | TAGGED WITH: GNOSTICS | PAGANISM | THEOLOGY | CATHOLICISM | ...MORE

GET THE LATEST FROM
PAGAN
SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

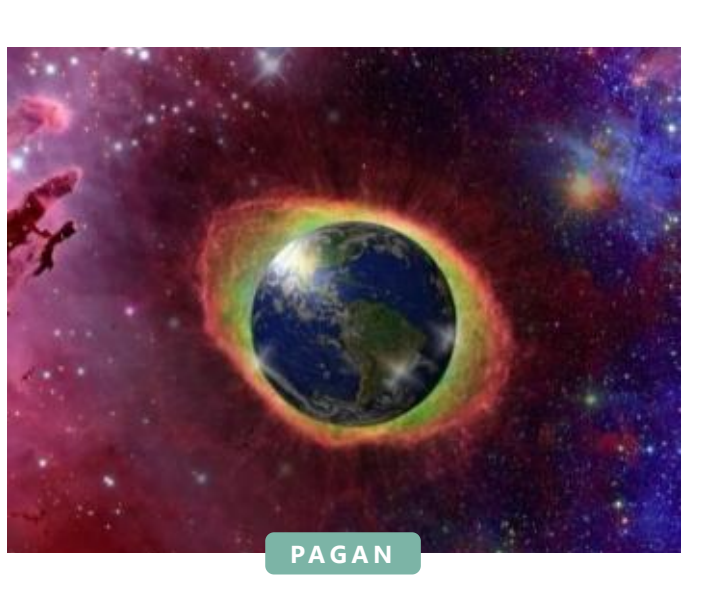
Enter email address
SIGN ME UP!
☑ Also, send me special offers.

< PREVIOUS POST
JUNE 21, 2013
Wisdom Is Sold in the Desolate Market

NEXT POST >
JULY 9, 2013
Wisdom & Wisecracks of the Old Ones

BROWSE OUR ARCHIVES
Select a Category | Select a Month

RELATED POSTS FROM
Aidan Kelly: Including Paganism

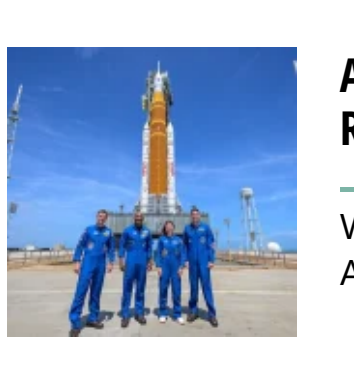

PAGAN
An Overview of My Life and the Craft
AIDAN KELLY: INCLUDING PAGANISM

PAGAN
All the Prophets Say
AIDAN KELLY: INCLUDING PAGANISM

PAGAN
Our Experiment in Religious Engineering
AIDAN KELLY: INCLUDING PAGANISM

PAGAN
On the Structure of Infinite Intelligence
AIDAN KELLY: INCLUDING PAGANISM

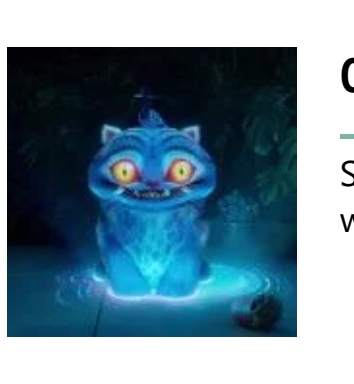
TRENDING AT PATHEOS PAGAN


Artemis II: A Pagan Reflection on the Return...
When NASA named its new lunar program Artemis, some of us in...

Two Smoking Wands: A Witchfest Mystery Romance
Austin Witchfest remains the highlight of my year, although this time around,...

The Future Is Uncertain: Be The Best Pagan...
I can't pretend all this doesn't bother me and I question the...

Ostara Versus Easter
We call it Ostara and as you know celebrate it during...


Cuddling the Universe: The Joy of Derpy
Sure, Kpop Demon Hunters is an animated movie with some banging music...

Auspicious Timing: Planets, Days & Signs for Magick
When is the best time to cast a spell? Many witches align...

VIEW ALL PAGAN BLOGS

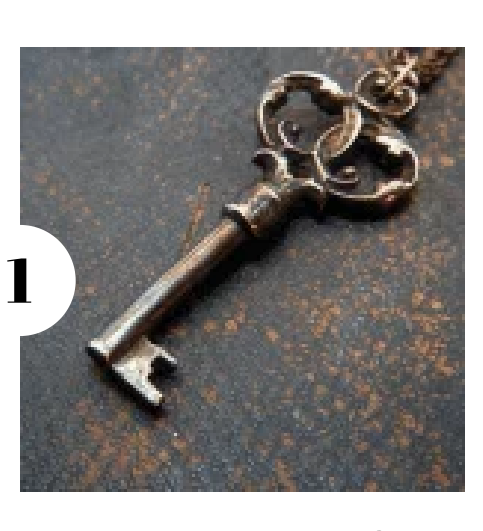
GET THE LATEST FROM
PAGAN
SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

Enter email address
SIGN ME UP!
☑ Also, send me special offers.

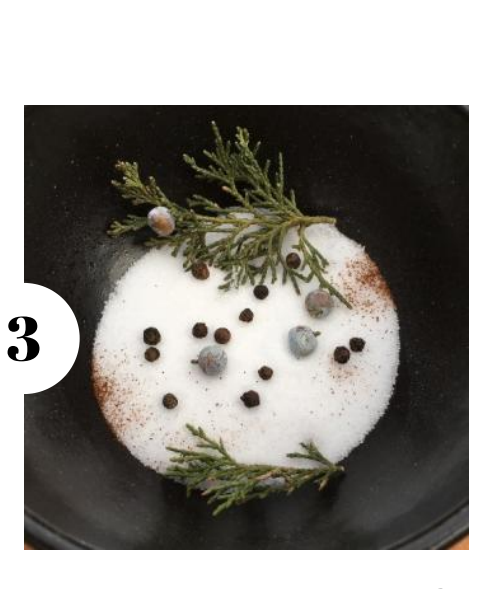
Search this blog... GO!

TAKE THE
Religious Wisdom Quiz
Who was Abraham's nephew?
Select your answer to see how you score.
Isaac
Jacob
Lot
Ishmael

OTHER RELATED CONTENT


1
The Many Epithets of Hekate
FOR PUCK'S SAKE

2
The Future Is Uncertain: Be The...
JOHN BECKETT


3
The Cleansing Power of Salt Bowls:...
STARLIGHT WITCH

4
Artemis II: A Pagan Reflection on...
LIGHT YOUR PATH

Copyright 2008-2026, Patheos. All rights reserved.